



Western Dairy News

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Innovative hands-on dairy teaching in the Southwest

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The trend in dairy teaching in the Southwest over the last decade is analogous to the milk production of a typical dairy cow in the Southwest affected by a hot southwestern summer: down, down, down!

It is difficult to identify the cause of this trend because two factors play a major role: federal funding, and student enrollment. When student enrollment drops, federal funding is reduced and university resources become more limited. Regardless of which came first, fewer students or less federal



Students observe colostrum management techniques at Dutch Valley Dairy in Clovis, NM.

funding, three major Land Grant Universities (Texas A&M, New Mexico State, and the University of Arizona) have closed the doors to their University dairies and student enrollment has fallen even further.

Ironically, while universities have decreased the opportunities for students interested in the dairy industry, as a group the Southwest states are currently the third largest milkshed in the U.S. and are expanding the fastest in terms of number of dairies, herd size, processing capacity, and economic impact. However, at this time there is not one Southwestern university offering a solid dairy program capable of teaching students how dairying is done in the Southwest!

While the Land Grant Universities have individually decreased their investment in dairy education, industry has come to the assistance of dairy producers in problem areas that affect daily management on large herd dairies. The Land Grant Universities that cover the large geographic area of the Southwest realize that dairy producers still need their help.

The solution to this problem of growing needs by dairy producers but limited resources at the universities has been solved by cooperation. The Southern Great Plains Dairy Consortium (SGPDC) was established as an answer to this problem. The SGPDC is a multiple university, multi disciplinary and interagency consortium. Its mission is to enhance the dairy industry's competitiveness as well as its ability to produce a safe, wholesome and competitively priced supply of milk and related products. This is achieved in an environmentally sound manner through expanded coopera-



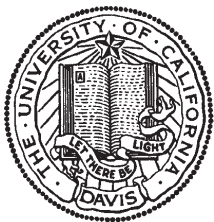
tive programs of the various universities, state agencies, and federal agencies serving the Southern Great Plains. Critical problem areas that have been identified are environmental management, water use, production, and human resource management.

There are three legs to the consortium of which two – research and Extension – move in unison. The third leg – teaching – has taken on a life of its own. While the research and Extension part of the consortium is trying to obtain federal funding for its efforts, the teaching program in the meantime has found financial support from producers, producer trade organizations and the allied industry.

The consortium's inaugural program was launched in summer 2008 in Clovis, New Mexico, an area chosen for its close proximity to dairies with all possible management levels, housing styles, and parlor designs. This location provided a unique opportunity to teach junior and senior students the "final touch" in dairy science: a large dose of hands-on, real-world dairy management in some of the largest herds of the Southwest.

The program is coordinated by faculty from the participating universities. Different modules are taught by nationally recognized and experienced faculty in large dairy

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management, thus insuring that material presented to students is the most recent information and technology available.

A group of 18 students from six different universities in the Southwest was selected to receive scholarships for the six-week class. At Clovis Community College the instructors taught several hours per day in the classroom on topics such as dairy benchmarking, nutrition, facilities and cow comfort.

The remainder of the day was spent on the dairy actually applying the science and looking at management in action. Here the students could see firsthand what different commodities and resulting rations look like, learn to interpret vet lists, check urine pHs, run TMRs through a shaker box, interpret feeding software, troubleshoot transition cows, and many more hands on experiences.

The beauty of hosting the program in Clovis, New Mexico is the location. Due to the large number of dairies that are located within 20 miles of the school, students were able to visit a different dairy every day during the six-week program!

Sufficient funds were raised so that the program could be provided at no cost to the students while in Clovis. The program was fully sponsored by the allied industry as well as producer promotion and trade organizations and individual producers. All of the sponsors have a vested interest in the students learning the practical, hands-on side of dairying, as well as wanting to get to know them personally through the "Wednesday Night Sponsor Forums".

During these evenings the sponsors shared with the students what their respective company is about, but also what it is the company is looking for in a prospective hire, possible openings and opportunities,

Advanced Dairy Herd Management

Southern Great Plains Dairy Consortium Teaching

The Southern Great Plains Dairy Consortium (SGPDCT) is a multi-university, interagency organization established to meet the educational and research needs of the rapidly expanding dairy industry in the Southern Great Plains. The Consortium provides a formal structure for coordinating teaching, research, extension and diagnostic service programs.



Due to budget constraints, many universities began consolidating departments, cutting certain research facilities and reassigning faculty in an effort to cut costs. Without a strong dairy faculty presence or the opportunity to pursue dairy courses, students are not exposed to the benefits and career opportunities offered to individuals who pursue a dairy science education. The SGPDCT is created specifically to address the need to improve the availability of dairy science education at universities in the Southwest and to ensure the growing dairy industry a well qualified pool of prospective employees for future employment.



The Southern Great Plains Dairy Consortium Advanced Large Herd Management Program offers:

- Strong research based dairy education in a welcoming, friendly environment.
- Individuals from faculty and industry throughout participating states, as well as nationally, collaborate to provide students with a unique educational experience and a multitude of employment opportunities.
- Courses are taught in the middle of the third largest milk shed in the U. S.
- Courses are coordinated by faculty from the participating universities. Faculty are recognized national experts.
- Within a 20-mile radius, there are 25 herds averaging over 2,200 milking cows.

Cooperating Institutions



For additional information, please contact:
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Gold Sponsors

RBS, BALCHEM, NM STATE, Dairy Producers of New Mexico, Southwestern Dairy Producers.

internship possibilities, and other useful information for the students. Without this widespread industry support this initiative would not be possible.

The organizers are extremely grateful for the financial support as well as the supportive criticism we have received on how to improve on the 2008 program. Both financial and participating support are necessary for the organizers to make this class into an industry-wide training program for graduating dairy and ag-business majors getting ready to become herd managers, technical representatives, Extension agents, etc.

An internship program will be developed for the 2009 program. During our recent Advisory Board meeting, producer representatives from Texas, Arizona and New Mexico

felt that a subsequent six-week internship with a dairy or one of the allied industry sponsors would be a valuable addition to the class. This internship will be another enhanced learning opportunity, as well as a checkpoint for students to make sure their careers are heading in the right direction.

One thing was made perfectly clear during the recent board meeting, especially after evaluating not only student responses but also some of the comments received from the allied industry sponsors: The Advanced Dairy Herd Management Program is definitely filling a void in current dairy teaching. Continuation and expansion of the program was highly encouraged.

At the moment of this writing we are in the midst of planning the 2009 program which will expand on and enhance the experiences from this summer's program. The current plan is to add modules which were not covered the first time, such as reproduction, animal health and human resource management. For more information on this rapidly developing program, please visit the internet at <http://sgpdct.tamu.edu/>



The Southern Great Plains Dairy Consortium inaugural class of 2008.

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